

Director's Corner: Parents-as-Playwrights

This spring, I have compared parenting to theatre directing and set design, claiming that parents define the vision for their children's developmental outcomes and design the atmosphere of their home to set the overall mood for the family and tone for their interactions. This month, I consider the role of "Playwright". ***How is being a parent like being a playwright?*** According to the American Association of Community Theatre (<https://www.aact.org/playwright>), "Playwrights create scripts ... [they] tell stories through the words and actions of characters". Similarly, based on the stories of their own childhoods, parents craft the narrative of the family's life together, which will then become the initial chapters for each child's life story.



playwright The AACT describes a playwright's "toolkit" as including "a vivid imagination, a gripping story to tell, insight into what makes people tick, etc. These same tools are essential for parents because we rarely get to choose all of the characters, plot elements, and settings that may be central to the final production. Extroverted parents who have chosen a lifestyle with highly public elements may bear an introverted child and have to creatively construct a revised narrative so that the child can blossom. The planned family vacation to visit the great grandparents may have a twist in the plot when one of them lands in the hospital, which may then require amending the planned setting, activities, etc.

Such imagination and insight are essential to Parents-as-Playwrights, because the family's story is the heart of the matter, the core messages of who we are in this world, as a unique and cohesive family composed of exceptional individuals. Just as a play cannot become a blockbuster by repeating what others have done or blindly following convention, families willing to write their own original narratives are most likely to construct family scripts with language, routines, expectations, and rules that best fit parents and children alike.

As mentioned in my article on the recent N4C Conference, Jason Kotecki, artist, motivational speaker, and father of three children ranging in age from 3 to 8, cautioned us to beware of following rules that don't actually exist. Maybe some of these will resonate with you.

- "Thou shalt act thine age."
- "Thou shalt color inside the lines."
- "Thou shalt not jump in puddles."
- "Thou shalt always be careful."
- "Thou shalt not make a mess."
- "Thine offspring shalt be in a million extracurricular activities."



Recently, I heard myself asking my granddaughter whether she wanted one ponytail on top or two pigtailed. "I want seven pigtailed," she said with joy. After just a moment's panicked hesitation, I said, "Why not? Let's see how many we can do before it's time to leave for the zoo." We can all enrich our family scripts when we share in what playwrights call "collective creation" with the actors.

Just like directors striving to craft a sensational production and set designers seeking "creative possibilities for movement", playwrights can most effectively tell a compelling story by imaginatively and artistically weaving elements to bring their stories to life in the theatre. Each day on the family stage, there is a story in the making, with a plot that twists and turns through life's ups and downs. We look forward to hearing your story and supporting your playwrighting along the way.